CONFIDENTIAL SECURITY INFORMATION

521 file R

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: January 27, 1953

SUBJECT: Communism in Guatemala; Effect on U.S.-Guatemalan Relations

PARTICIPANTS: Señor Dr. Don Guillermo Toriello, Ambassador of Guatemala
MID - Mr. Clark
Mr. Leddy

COPIES TO: American Embassy, Guatemala (Informally)
ARA - Mr. Mann
MID - Mr. Rubottom
ARA Board
DRA

1-1493

Mr. Clark and Mr. Leddy this morning paid a courtesy call on Ambassador Toriello. The purpose of the visit was to provide Mr. Clark an opportunity to say goodbye to the Ambassador and to introduce his successor in the Department.

Following the usual exchange of pleasantries and after having discussed a few matters of a minor nature, Ambassador Toriello asked Mr. Clark and Mr. Leddy what they thought of what he termed the stepped-up "campaign" in the U.S. press against Guatemala. When Mr. Clark and Mr. Leddy said they did not understand what the Ambassador referred to, the latter replied that he was referring to the articles which had recently appeared in the U.S. press on the situation in Guatemala, especially the articles by Robert Hallett in the Christian Science Monitor, the story carried in the U.S. News and World Report and those which had appeared in Time and Newsweek. He went on to say that these reports had given a false picture of the election results in Guatemala. They had, he said, represented the elections as a communist victory, whereas the defeat of Jose Manuel Fortuny, Secretary General of the Communist Party, had actually discredited the communists. This had been his Government's aim, as he had told Secretary Acheson in New York in December. The Ambassador declared that this was evidence that the Guatemalan Government was following a policy of discrediting the communists and thereby containing their influence.

Mr. Clark

714.001/1-2753
Must Be Returned to
CONFIDENTIAL FILES
FEB 13 1953
CS/H

CONFIDENTIAL SECURITY INFORMATION
2/9/62

Mr. Clark said that he had not as yet seen the Time, Newsweek, or U.S. News and World Report articles, but he had read the Hallett articles in the Christian Science Monitor. He knew Mr. Hallett to be a first rate, reputable reporter and had thought that his articles had reflected the existing situation in Guatemala quite accurately. He wondered what part of those articles the Ambassador believed were inaccurate. In reply the Ambassador conceded that the Hallett articles had been well written and even went so far as to characterize them as "objective". But, he said, the other stories to which he had referred were in his opinion inaccurate in their interpretation of the election results.

Mr. Clark suggested that the course of action pursued by the Guatemalan Government with regard to Fortuny, as described by the Ambassador, seemed certainly to be somewhat oblique and he believed easily subject to a different interpretation. Observers of the Guatemalan scene saw the Government parties aligning themselves in a "Democratic Electoral Front" with the Communist Party and putting Fortuny on the joint ticket. They saw influential Government political leaders throw full support to his candidacy. The President's own Secretary General, Diaz Rozzotto, had from the same platform with Fortuny praised the latter to the skies and described the Communist Party as the only true party of the revolution. They had seen Fortuny receive the full backing and support of the Government and pro-Government press and radio. Little wonder then that these observers had concluded not that the Government sought to discredit Fortuny and the Communist Party, but rather that they had been discredited by the citizenry of Guatemala in spite of the Government's best efforts on their behalf. In the light of these evidences of Government assistance to Mr. Fortuny in his campaign, Mr. Clark thought, it would be difficult for an objective observer of the scene to reach the conclusion that the Guatemalan Government was endeavoring to discredit the communists.

Ambassador Toriello then stated that the communists were small in number in Guatemala, that proportionately there were more communists in the United States than there were in Guatemala. He cited this as evidence that the communists had little influence in the Guatemalan scene. Mr. Clark and Mr. Leddy responded to the effect that the communists were always small in number but were adroit in the technique of infiltrating key positions in the Government and other phases of national life. To contain the influence and power of the communists it was necessary to isolate them from positions of importance. Having recognized the danger to the security of this country of the international communist conspiracy, the people and Government of the United States had adopted vigorous measures to seek out and remove

the

the communists from important positions in Government, labor, industry, education, etc. In the case of Guatemala it was not always so clear that the Government recognized the conspiratorial character of the international communist movement and the danger which it represented to Guatemala. Mr. Clark recalled a conversation he had had with the Ambassador's predecessor, Ambassador Aldana Sandoval, a year and a half ago (see memorandum of conversation of June 28, 1951) when the latter had advanced the argument that the communists were not influential in Guatemala because they were small in number. At that time Mr. Clark called the Ambassador's attention to the fact that at a communist meeting in celebration of the anniversary of the foundation of the communist newspaper Octubre the Guatemalan Minister of Education and the President of the National Assembly, Roberto Alvarado Fuentes, had been in attendance and participated in the meeting. The attendance of such high Government officials at communist meetings gave rise to question in the minds of the people in this country as to what the attitude of the Guatemalan Government really was with respect to the communist movement. Mr. Clark had asked Ambassador Aldana if he could conceive of the United States Secretary of Interior and the President of the Senate, Mr. Barkley, attending a communist party rally in New York. Ambassador Aldana had indicated to Mr. Clark that he understood this difference and that the point was well taken.

Ambassador Toriello said that he had made a number of good friends in New York, Philadelphia and elsewhere in this country since his arrival here and that he was receiving daily phone calls from these friends asking him if he had read such and such an article which had just appeared and whether or not it was true that Guatemala was a communist country. He said this was very disturbing. He himself was not a communist, as we knew, nor was the Government communist. President Arbenz was not a communist and no one in the Cabinet was either. His Government was merely interested in promoting social reform, raising the standard of living of the people and bettering their lot. In the old days of Ubico the peasants and the indians were put in chains and forced to work for the benefit of a few. President Arbenz' Government aimed at freeing the indians and the workers from their chains. Thus they had promoted the organization of labor unions, developed a social security system, passed an agrarian reform law and taken other similar measures. This program was not communistic but liberal and progressive.

Mr. Leddy said that the United States Government certainly had no quarrel with the objective of social reform. In this country labor unions

have

have achieved a state of advancement second to none in the world. We had an advanced system of social security. The welfare of the people of the United States was the primary concern of the United States Government. These objectives could be achieved, however, as witness the United States, without the assistance of the communists. In fact, although the communists gave lip service to social reform and at all times were careful to identify themselves with such objectives, their real aim was quite different. Very succinctly, it was to serve the international interests and objectives of the Soviet Union, under whose direction they operated. Were the communists serving Guatemala's interests only, or showing interest in the welfare of the Guatemalan people, when they accused the U.S. of being the aggressor in Korea, when they promoted the Soviet-inspired "peace" propaganda movement, etc.?

The next point the Ambassador made was that the mass of Guatemalan labor was not communist, that they belonged to the unions because the unions offered them protection and gave them a means to bargain with employers. Because the unions advanced their interests, they belonged to the unions and supported the union leaders. If one asked them if they were communists, however, they would vehemently deny that they were. This was another proof, the Ambassador said, that the Guatemalan people were not communists.

Mr. Clark said that there was no doubt in his mind that the mass of Guatemalan labor was not communist. The important thing however, it seemed to him, was that the Guatemalan labor movement was controlled by the communists. Victor Manuel Gutierrez, Secretary General of the General Labor Federation, had returned from Moscow in January 1952, recommended that Guatemala establish diplomatic relations with Red China, urged cultural exchange between Guatemala and Russia and announced that he was dissolving his Stalinist party FROG to join the communist party since the aims of both parties were the same. There could be no question about his affiliations and loyalties. Moreover, the officers of the CGTG were almost solidly communist. The Ambassador could be sure that when a pronouncement was made by the CGTG in the name of all Guatemalan labor in support of the "peace" movement or some equivalent communist activity, Mr. Gutierrez and his slate of officers had not consulted with or obtained the consent of the uneducated, largely illiterate members of the organization.

The Ambassador did not argue this point further but went on to say that Guatemala was embarked on a program of full democracy and was intent

upon

upon fulfilling the guarantees of the Constitution which permitted any and all citizens to express their own views and ideologies. The Guatemalan Constitution, he said, prohibited any discrimination against Guatemalan citizens because of race, color, creed, religion, or ideology. To move against the communists would require a return to the police state methods of Ubico and the Government would not revert back to Ubicoism.

Mr. Leddy said he thought there was a mean course between the two extremes mentioned by the Ambassador. In this country, he said, we had not outlawed the communist party but, recognizing that the ultimate objective of the communists was to destroy our Government and way of life, we had taken protective measures through the passage of appropriate legislation. Freedom of action within the bounds of these legislative protective measures was still guaranteed. Also, by administrative measures our Government has sought to detect and weed out communist elements from positions in Government. Mr. Clark referred to the fact that a leading communist, Alfonso Solorzano, was in the key position of Director of the Social Security Institute. Was there any reason why, he asked, Mr. Solorzano could not be removed as a purely administrative measure by the Executive? Such a move would be in accordance with the prerogative of the Executive under the law and certainly therefore would not constitute a police state action. The Ambassador conceded that he knew of no reason why this could not be done but said that naturally the Government could not remove the leaders of the labor movement, which was independent of the Government. Mr. Leddy concurred in this latter view but suggested that if the Government so desired it could find other means, of an indirect nature, to accomplish this purpose.

After considerable more discussion, the Ambassador stated that he was returning to Guatemala, as we knew, on the following evening and he intended to discuss this whole matter thoroughly with the President. He stated that he was here in Washington to promote better relations between the United States and his country and that if this was not possible he would not stay on as Ambassador. Mr. Clark and Mr. Leddy expressed their appreciation at the Ambassador's frankness and Mr. Leddy said that he would be more than happy to discuss this subject again with the Ambassador at any time the latter desired.

ARA:MID:EWClark:mcm